

March 5, 2014

Public Health Committee  
Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106-1591

Public Health Committee,

RE: HB 5326

I am written to encourage you to support physician assisted "aid in dying" legislation when it is presented to the Public Health Committee.

Pre-statement: To attach/use the word "suicide" for any discussions of this bill is a ploy to put a negative connotation on the issue by the opponents of the legislation. Please do not be fooled by their attempt to inject non-factual, illogical, emotional elements into this important human rights issue. I know you will be politically pressured by groups with retribution if you favor this legislation, but you might want to consider the very real possibility that one day you or your loved one, would want this basic right.

The issue of physician assisted "aid in dying" can be summed up into three main topics: Laws, Emotions and Religion.

Laws:

Laws are made by people and those laws keep evolving with changing attitudes due to knowledge gained by education. We live with laws during our entire life time, but the right to have control over ones own life at its end, has to be a fundamental human right. We should not be making laws that restrict our one last final choice in life, especially if that choice is rooted in compassion and logic. Many "safeguards" can be built into the physician assisted "aid in dying" laws to protect those that are not capable of making a decision to end their life . The existing "aid in dying" laws in other states, can only be applied in limited situations and it is the duty of our elected officials to provide these safeguards, but physician assisted "aid in dying" should become legal.

As shown in the five states that have passed physician assisted "aid in dying", a majority of citizens believe this issue is a basic human right between the patient, family and their doctor. Public polls in Connecticut have seen approvals of over 80% on this issue.

Connecticut should now join Washington state, Oregon, Montana, Vermont and New Mexico and pass physician assisted "aid in dying" legislation.

Emotion:

The process of dying is obviously very emotional to the patient and to their family and friends. So why should there be restrictive laws making the matter even more difficult?

Yes, emotions run high and concerns must be addressed on such an important topic, but elected officials have a duty to look beyond the emotional aspect of the proposed legislation and apply the facts to this issue. If they research the "Compassion and Choice" website and the "aid in dying" newly enacted laws in Washington state, Oregon, Montana, Vermont and New Mexico, they would discover that the past opposition to the "right to die" issue is mostly emotional, not logical.

### Religion:

The Catholic Church has been one of the chief opponents of the "aid in dying" movement and their continued intervention has to be addressed.

The following is a hypothetical situation that illustrates why it is wrong to allow the Catholic Church or any religion to influence our legal system especially on the physician assisted "aid in dying" issue:

Consider for a moment that the followers of Christian Scientist Church were the majority religion in Connecticut and since they would be the majority, many followers of this religion would be elected officials. As a result, laws could be passed that would reflect their religious beliefs.

Christian Scientists believe that taking medication and getting medical intervention is against their belief and that their God will either heal them or require that they die. The laws these elected officials enact could prevent their constituents from using pain killers to ease suffering. They could restrict the use of drugs or medical procedures that could easily eliminate disease or heal the sick. As a result, their constituents would be condemned to live in pain and die horrible deaths all controlled by the beliefs of the Christian Scientists.

Extreme? Not humane? Yet, there have been many news articles where Christian Scientists have let their children die in agony, because of their personal religious belief and in many of these cases the legal system has let them get away with it.

Why is this hypothetical situation any different than having the Catholic Church tell others what is right or wrong based on the doctrine of that church? Why should the Catholic Church have the last say in other people's lives to satisfy their own religious dogma and God? Why should people suffer in the last days of their lives because some elected representative is putting their religious belief before their civic commitment to represent all of their constituents, many of which may not share the same religious belief? There is also an implied "separation of church and state" in this country that should be honored by all.

The Catholic Church establishment has issues with their own followers in matters such as birth control, the "aid in dying" issue, and even their priests' behavior. They have issues controlling their own members, so why should they have the power to tell others what they can and cannot

do, especially when people are in pain and terminally ill. Through influence and that power, the Catholic church has indirectly forced many desperate people to commit violent acts of mercy to assist their loved ones in the dying process and you read about these cases every month or so in the news. Those acts of mercy are considered "murder" by our legal system and the Catholic Church has helped make criminals out of these loving, caring people and all of this could be prevented in the future by passing the physician assisted "aid in dying" legislation.

If the Catholic Church, Christian Scientists, or any religion can convince their followers that they should "suffer to the end", so be it, but they should not be allowed to have influence or legal control over others. Religious intervention should not be a consideration in our civil laws, including the "aid in dying" issue.

It should be noted that many other religions have no objection to the "aid in dying" issue. They respect the beliefs and rights of others and they do not impose their own religious beliefs on our civil laws.

Summary:

The whole issue comes down to one word: Choice. If someone is capable of making the choice for their own death, because they are terminally ill, there should not be laws preventing physicians from assisting them to die peacefully and with dignity. Many people that have won this elementary right have chosen not to go through with the assistance. But the very fact that they can and do have that choice is a comforting factor during their transition to death. They know that they are still in control and can count on this option if they feel it is necessary.

Without a change in the existing laws, there will continue to be prolonged mental and physical suffering of the patient and family during the transition from life to death. Wouldn't it be better to have compassion and choice, followed by a peaceful, pain-free, dignified death?

You have a choice on this issue, please let others have their own choice.

Sincerely,

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